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Subject: FW: Greenwire (1-10) Feds to probe W.Va. chemical spill; 200,000 without water

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Subject: Greenwire (1-10) Feds to probe W.Va. chemical spill; 200,000 without water

Feds to probe W.Va. chemical spill; 200,000 without water

Jason Plautz, E&E reporter

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The U.S. attorney in West Virginia said his office and other federal officials have opened an investigation into a spill of a chemical used in coal production into the Elk River that has effectively shut down Charleston, W.Va., the state's capital.

The White House and the state government have declared a state of emergency and hundreds of thousands of Charleston residents have been ordered not to drink tap water after the spill tainted supplies. The leak of 4-methylcyclohexane methanol, or MCHM, has left some 200,000 people across nine counties without drinking water and has closed schools, businesses and government offices.

U.S. attorney Booth Goodwin said in a news release today that the office had opened an investigation into the release and would determine both the cause and whatever action should be taken.

"Yesterday's release of a potentially dangerous chemical into our water supply has put hundreds of thousands of West Virginians at risk, severely disrupted our region's economy and upended people's daily lives," Goodwin said.

According to reports, regulators suspect that the chemical is coming from a leaking storage unit owned by Charleston-based Freedom Industries Inc., a specialty chemical producer. The tank is located at a storage facility just a mile north of the intake of a water treatment plant.

Officials have still not determined the full extent of the leak, which was discovered yesterday.

With limited supplies of bottled water, many stores ran out quickly and residents are waiting on new shipments and water trucks expected this afternoon. In a statement, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin (D) urged residents to not use tap water for drinking, cooking, washing or bathing, adding "right now, our priorities are our hospitals, nursing homes and schools."

President Obama joined Tomblin in issuing an emergency declaration, freeing up federal aid and assistance to the state.

MCHM can cause irritation of the skin and eyes, and prolonged exposure can cause headaches and difficulty breathing. It is primarily used to separate coal particles in coal production.

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